MARRIAGE IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES
2. *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-west Pakistan*, edited by E. R. Leach
MARRIAGE IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

EDITED BY
MEYER FORTES

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PREFACE

This is the third of a series of occasional papers in social anthropology published by the Cambridge University Press for the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology of the University of Cambridge. We plan to publish further volumes at intervals of about one year. Each volume will be edited by a member of the editorial board and will contain a number of papers arising out of anthropological work carried out in the Department. Each volume will deal, as far as possible, with a single broad topic of theoretical interest. The main contributions will ordinarily take the form of papers based on field research in particular areas and communities, but each volume will also include an introductory paper in which the main theoretical issues referred to in the other papers will be explicitly discussed.

The present issue has been edited by Meyer Fortes, who also contributes the introduction. Professor Fortes wishes to express appreciation of the assistance given by Dr Jack Goody in seeing this issue through the press and of the facilities placed at his disposal by the Director and the staff of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioural Sciences, Stanford, California, during a summer visit there.

The fourth number of the series, to be edited by Jack Goody, will use material from centralized political systems in Africa and be concerned with problems arising from systems of succession to office.

We are indebted to the Smuts Memorial Fund of the University of Cambridge for a grant in aid of the publication of this series.

Meyer Fortes
Jack Goody
E. R. Leach
INTRODUCTION

By MEYER FORTES

The papers in the present symposium deal with diverse aspects of marriage. Three give accounts of ethnographical observations in African tribal societies and the fourth offers a re-analysis of data extracted from that treasury of ethnographical riches, Malinowski's Trobriand corpus.

So much is now known about the customs and institutions of marriage in all human societies that it might seem doubtful if anything new can be added. Nor are there conspicuous lacunae in the theoretical study of the subject. It so happens that Malinowski, Lowie and Radcliffe-Brown, surely the three foremost authorities of their time on the comparative sociology of marriage, all left comprehensive statements of their conclusions (Malinowski 1929; Lowie 1933; Radcliffe-Brown 1950); and the general principles they set forth do not seem to me to be invalidated by later research. Add the massive investigations of Lévi-Strauss and his colleagues, as well as such compendious recent works as African Systems of Kinship and Marriage and the Survey of African Marriage and Family Life, and there would seem to be little an ethnographer can now contribute save further illustrations of well-known facts and principles.

Such, indeed, is the main intention of the four essays collected together in this volume. Conceptual and theoretical considerations are kept well under control. But they are not irrelevant; for however particular an ethnographic inquiry may be, direction is given to it by implicit conceptual categories and theoretical criteria. And even so thoroughly explored a terrain as marriage in tribal society may yield unexpected theoretical surprises to a new approach.

An apt illustration occurs in Dr La Fontaine's paper. Like the Taita and some other East African peoples with developed patrilineal lineage systems, the Gisu do not prohibit marriage between agnates outside the range of the minimal lineage. In fact, marriage with lineage kin beyond the prohibited degrees is common. But, says Dr La Fontaine, after marriage the affinal relationship ousts the descent relationship. The individuals are the same people as before. But before the marriage, the husband and his close patrilineal kin defined the wife and her minimal lineage as co-descendants of common patrilineal ancestors. They were therefore vested with rights and duties, entitled to loyalties and regarded with the sentiments that are mandatory for patrilineal kin. Now, after the marriage, their social relations undergo what looks like a striking reversal. Instead, for example, of the familiarity which is normal between kin they must behave with the mutual
deference which is obligatory between affines; instead of the unqualified
support which kinsfolk must give one another in war, affines may withhold aid
if they wish.

The inherent antithesis between kinship bonds and affinal relations is
common, probably normal, in all societies in which genealogical connexions
between persons otherwise eligible as spouses are recognized and where
kinship within fixed degrees is a lawful impediment to marriage. It is an
antithesis which epitomizes the cleavage between the domain of kinship and
the domain of non-kinship in social structure. What Dr La Fontaine docu-
ments is that people cannot be both kinsmen and affines to one another in the
same context of social relations. Hence if prospective spouses are kin in their
premarital status relations their kinship must be extinguished for them to
be able to marry. This is done among the Gisu, and thereupon affinity takes
its place.

It is pertinent that this shift is implemented and kept in being, not only
among the Gisu, of course, but very generally in African society, by the flow of
marriage payments. However, what I want to draw attention to here is the
bearing of Dr La Fontaine’s observation on a wider theoretical issue. Recent
studies of South Indian kinship and marriage institutions (Dumont 1957;
Gough 1959) have been concerned with the relative significance of affinal
status and kinship in adherence to rules of cross-cousin marriage. The
African conception typified by Gisu custom is closely paralleled by South
Indian data. [1] To my mind what emerges clearly from both sets of observa-
tions is that, in dynamic terms, it is marriage which generates affinal relation-
ship and not vice versa (cf. Goody 1959, for an incisive criticism of Dumont’s
contrary hypothesis). In formal terms, marriage is the bridge between the
kinship side and the affinal side of the dichotomy that is of necessity built into
the total genealogically defined domain of social relations which we find in
every social system. It is a necessary corollary of the incest law, as Lévi-
Strauss has so cogently demonstrated (1949). In other words, there would
be no point to marriage ceremonies and legal instruments if the pre-marital
status of the spouses in relation to each other and to their relevant kin were
already affinal in character.

This brings me to one of the most interesting contributions of this collec-
tion of essays. A complex and fundamental problem in the comparative
sociology of marriage is that of the regulations, conditions and criteria
governing the choice of a spouse and the procedure of espousal entailed thereby.
For everything connected with marriage is directed to this outcome.

Marriage, some say, is a lottery; or, as Montaigne says more vividly in his
essay ‘Of Three Good Women’, it is ‘a bargain full of thorny circumstances’.
In discussing the selection of spouses and the formalities of marriage we are,
in effect, asking what kind of bargain is struck, who are the parties to it and
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what are the rules and circumstances of the bargaining game. I put it this way because it is tempting to describe the process in the language of the Theory of Games, with the simplest two-person zero-sum game as the ‘model’. The data are not at hand, in the papers under discussion, to go as far, for instance, as Dr Barth in his ingenious use of this approach in the analysis of Swat Pathan intra-lineage politics (Barth 1959). But Dr Harris’s paper, in particular, includes data that do lend themselves to a re-statement on the lines of game theory.

If we consider marriage as an event in a life history it can be treated as a transaction between two parties. In the type of society we are concerned with they consist of the principals—the bride and bridegroom—and certain designated kin of each, determined by jural and moral tenets and rules relating to the status of persons. In connexion with my earlier remarks about affinal relations, it is important to note that these two parties are normally defined as being non-kin within the context of the marriage transaction. The ‘game’ requires that they be defined as opponents, each aiming at profiting rather than losing by the outcome. Custom gives reiterated expression to this theme, often in the mimicry of ceremony. Characteristically and significantly, the controlling position in each party is held by the parents, notably the father, or a parental collateral, or deputy, of quasi-paternal status.

The ‘game’ is played subject to a body of rules, conventions, and constraints which, in part, limit and, in part, direct the strategies and tactics of the ‘players’. The rules comprise jural and moral ordinances that emanate from the politico-jural domain of social structure and will be enforced by agencies of society. These include the very common rules of incest and exogamy and such special cases as, for example, the Taita rule that marriage is not allowed between the descendants of a common grandfather. They also include procedural rules such as those relating to the sequence of gifts and countergifts in Trobriand marriage, to bride-price negotiations, and so on. An instance of a convention is the permissibility of recourse to elopement in certain circumstances. And a good example of a constraint is the economic need for particular kinds of farming land among the Taita, or for affinal support in gaining political advancement among the Gisu.

To continue the analogy, we can try to determine what are the values at stake, though it is not easy to keep this in line with the ‘constant sum’ model of the theory. Most anthropologists would agree that the Capital Value is the set of rights in the bride’s sexual and procreative capacities and the domestic services that go with them. But our task is complicated by the coupling of this value with the bride-price or other marriage gifts, payments and services. The sum total of marital rights and the marriage prestations constitute a single fund of value from an outsider’s point of view. Our problem is to account for the distribution of its components. Bride-price and marital rights
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move in opposite directions and remain on opposite sides, as between the parties.[4] But they tend towards a balance, in jural terms, and it is of special interest to note, from such data as are provided both by Dr Harris and by Dr La Fontaine, how the balance between the two components is often kept in suspense. This is brought about by arrangements for the transfer of the bride-price and other prestations to be spread out over a period of time, and, concomitantly, for the rights of the husband to be handed over seriatim.

The ‘game’ is further complicated by the Ancillary Values that are realizable through a marriage in consequence of the status relationships and connexions of the parties. The alliance with a spouse’s relatives may be valued for the wealth, influence, political power or mere goodwill it can mobilize. Social geography may be a consideration when, as among both the Taita and the Gisu, the advantages of proximity of residence to a father-in-law with command over land resources have to be weighed against the attractions of an extra-neighbourhood marriage which is attainable without delay for a poor man.

Whether or not he reckons up the alternatives systematically—and doubtless he does not—a Taita suitor and his party have three plans of action to choose from. Dr Harris describes them under the headings of Completed Betrothal, Curtained Betrothal and Elopement, the last being perhaps resorted to by young men only when the more formal and approved procedures fail. The bride’s party, for their part, can either stand out for the first form, compromise on the second, or accept the third with as good a grace as they can muster. They exploit the law that no marriage can be legitimate without the transfer of the bride-price, in whole or in an agreed part, in developing their strategy. That is to say they manoeuvre in terms of the kind and amounts of marriage prestations they will accept in return for the marital rights they are obliged to concede. For the Taita, it is tempting to guess that the half-way house of Curtained Betrothal is likely to be the compromise most acceptable to both parties.

The point of principle need not be laboured any further. A marriage is an event in the career of an individual and in the developmental cycle of families and kin-groups (cf. Cambridge Papers, 1, 1958). It comes about by individuals making use of economic resources, social relations, laws and beliefs, in choosing the most rewarding way—within the limits set by social norms—of fulfilling their private purposes. This is the aspect of marriage I have been comparing to the procedures that figure in Game Theory.

But if we are looking at marriage as an institution, the more appropriate questions are where does it fit into the structure of society and what are the ingredients of custom that mark it off as a distinctive institution.

Let us consider, again, the manoeuvres to gain a spouse. Before they can begin a choice has to be made. In such famous and voluminously discussed
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closed or prescriptive systems as those of Australia and of Southern India, this is ostensibly fixed by rules that prescribe eligibility for marriage in advance. A man must marry a cross-cousin, or rather, to put it more generally, a woman who can be placed in a category designated by the kinship term for cross-cousin by virtue of a recognized classificatory rule which, in extreme cases, simply divides all the opposite sex members of one’s own generation in the endogamous group into non-marriageable ‘siblings’ and marriageable ‘cross-cousins’. This fixes the structural provenance of spouses quite strictly by reference to their pre-marital genealogical identification and classification. Manoeuvres to gain a particular person as spouse are limited in scope and may even be prescribed.

It is quite different in the open (or prescriptive) systems we are dealing with here. In theory spouses can be taken from any genealogically and politically licit group—for instance, one that is not proscribed by rules of incest or exogamy, or is not a member of an inferior caste—in a population that is likely to be large by comparison with that of an Australian tribe or South Indian local caste group. Is the actual selection of spouses in a given generation, or over a stretch of several generations, then purely random or is there some implicit or explicit regularity in it?

Dr Harris and Dr La Fontaine have addressed themselves to this problem. They confirm observations that have previously been made in other parts of Africa, for example among the Tallensi of Northern Ghana (Fortes 1940, ch. xi). Allowing for the bounds set by incest prohibitions and exogamic regulations, which may be implicit rather than explicitly formulated, as, for instance, in the Israeli Kibbutz described by Spiro (1958: ch. xiv), it seems that there is a distinct preferential bias in these open systems. The bias is in favour of marriage within close permissible geographical or social range, rather than far afield. Thus there is a high incidence of inter-marriage between members of geographically neighbouring or socially related families and groups, whether these are genealogically, locally, occupationally or otherwise defined, and the rate decreases along a regular gradient as the spatial or social distance between the parties increases. The inference is that, whatever rationalizations people may give for their choices of spouses, in open systems the odds are large that they will fall within the nearest accessible circle of mates defined as eligible in jural and other customary terms. The same results may come about in closed systems; but this is because eligible spouses are specified by genealogical or ritual rules, or by physical conditions that impose propinquity on spouses, as in an island community.

It should be noted that this tendency is not confined to tribal societies. It occurs to some extent in North Indian castes (cf. Gould 1960), and has been encountered in some segments of western industrial societies. Residential propinquity has been shown to have a strong influence on the choice of
spouses in some American cities (cf. Marches and Turbeville 1953, which reviews and adds new data to earlier well-known studies of this propensity). There are cities in which up to 70% of marriages, in certain areas, take place between persons who reside within twenty blocks of each other. Social propinquity, in the sense of class, occupational, educational, religious and such-like solidarity, is commonly believed to influence marriage and many studies have confirmed that this is true for the United States (cf. for example, Centers 1949). [1] It was, of course, a firmly held ideal and practice in Europe, as readers of nineteenth-century novels know, and still prevails in many areas. Among recent studies in Great Britain, Mrs Stacey's description of social life in Banbury shows that there is a distinct tendency towards class and local endogamy among native-born inhabitants of the town (Stacey 1960, App. 7), and this is probably characteristic of similar small towns and villages in England. A more striking example comes from rural Holland where, as Dr Ishwaran's fascinating monograph (Ishwaran 1959, pp. 50ff.) brings out so vividly, marriage is quite explicitly circumscribed by considerations of class, denominational, educational and local solidarity.

I adduce these American and European data for a particular reason. They indicate that the preference for propinquity in the choice of spouses is not due to such accidental factors as the simplicity of economic life or the limitations on freedom of movement due to poor communications or rudimentary political institutions in tribal society. It arises from an invariable concomitant of marriage that is taken into account in all anthropological discussions of the subject but is apt to be ignored by other social scientists. I mean, of course, the structural consequences of the fact that the principals in marriage are normally not isolated individuals but status-endowed persons whose union commits both them and those with whom they have pre-marital social ties to new social relationships. The most general and most important of these are the inescapable affinal relationships. These are critical because it is through them that the structurally discrete conjugal unit is fitted into the external systems of political, juridical, economic and religious institutions and arrangements. Structural propinquity between the parties is conducive to marriage because it facilitates continuity and consistency between the network of status relations in which they and their kin were placed before their marriage and the status arrangements that are the result of the marriage. Local intra-marriage is but a special case of this more general principle. At its simplest, it may make it easier for both the spouses and their kin to manage their mutual affinal relationships without detriment to the loyalties and obligations that persist from their pre-marital social and personal relations.

But by the same token structural propinquity may be associated with wide geographical separation; for different status values may act in what seem like contrary directions to achieve what appears to be the same end of maximizing
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affinal solidarity. Dr Harris and Dr La Fontaine have some highly instructive data on this subject. The newly married young Taita benefits by living in his wife's father's neighbourhood because this makes it feasible to borrow land from his affines. The father-in-law, in turn, thinks it useful to have his son-in-law close under his eye. The Taita elder, on the other hand, with his established economic and jural position, stands to gain coveted political prestige by marrying into a distant community and making use of his affinal ties to win support abroad. The richest and the poorest among the Gisu both tend to marry far away, but they seek spatially distant affines for contrary reasons. Trobriand chiefs, Mrs Robinson reminds us, follow a policy of taking wives from a wide range of clans so that they may have a wide network of affinal allies and well-distributed sources of supplies.

To choose a spouse with an eye to the in-laws one may become connected with is a common enough practice in many societies. In some cases the aim, avowedly, is to build up or maintain affinal alliances. Marriage then appears as virtually nothing more than an indispensable adjunct to such alliances. Doubtless there are traces of this in, for instance, the marriages of Taita elders. Let cynics make what they wish of the motives and attitudes that may be inferred from such practices. We must remember, however, that they conform to standard patterns in the societies we have been discussing; and their main interest for us lies in the structural principles and customary norms which they represent. The manner in which status position influences choice of affinal alignments has been noted. Prospective affinal alignments and interests in turn decide which of the several jurally permissible modes of espousal is adopted, be it at the demand of the woman's party or merely by their acquiescence. This is where the game-like manoeuvres play a part. And in passing it is worth noting how widely espousal by elopement is conceded. The reason is simple. It is a kind of escape mechanism. It enables marriages to be achieved when the principals are in all respects well suited and lawfully eligible but adventitious impediments stand in the way of orthodox procedure, for example when the jural superiors of one or the other are unjustifiably recalcitrant or when the suitor is handicapped by poverty. This relates to the basic limiting fact in marriage. In tribal societies it is normally accepted that every adult has a right to get married. It is regarded as a necessary attribute, not only of maturity, but of citizenship, in the sense of membership of the widest political community. A parent or any other person who uses authority derived from his domestic or descent status to obstruct this right without just cause may incur public censure. The fait accompli of an elopement may be as welcome a way out for the responsible parent as it is for the young couple.

The issue of status is central. To adapt (without disrespect to its distinguished author) the most hackneyed of all sociological aphorisms, marriage
could be briefly defined as the sanctioned movement from the filial status of son or daughter to the conjugal status of husband or wife. This holds, in the broadly descriptive sense, at any rate, for first marriages. And first marriages are decisive both for the spouses, for the domestic groups from which they move, and for those which they eventually start. A person’s first marriage constitutes a critical, that is an irreversible change of status, one of the most important in the life cycle. Dr Goody’s study provides an insight into what this means. A Gonja woman’s first marriage creates once and for all the inextinguishable and irreversible status of wife for her. Frequent divorce and remarriage is customary among the Gonja. But later marriages do not add to or subtract from the uxorial status gained by a first marriage. This is symbolized and sanctioned by the requirement that a woman must be ritually freed from the sexual control of her first husband when he dies, no matter how many husbands she has had since. This concept of uxorial status is found in other parts of Africa (e.g. among the Hausa: cf. M. F. Smith 1958) and elsewhere. I would guess that it is implied in the Trobriand manner of establishing a marriage and in such nuptial ceremonies as the Nayar tali tying rite. In structural terms one might say that first marriage establishes the husband–wife constellation as an entity which is maintained through the entire life of the partners as if it were ideally the same, regardless of any permutations of the members of the unit. This is analogous to leviratic marriage, if it is thought of as the original marriage of the widow continued with the aid of a new incumbent of the office of husband, primarily in his physical aspect, as sexual and economic mate.

Dr Goody’s observations confirm what we know from other sources, that the significant feature for which first marriage is thus jurally and ritually singled out is the sexual roles it creates. Anthropologists agree that what distinguishes the conjugal relationship uniquely from all other dyadic relationships, and isolates it as the core of the domestic domain, is the exclusive, or at the minimum privileged sexual rights and claims of the spouses on each other. These rights and claims pertain to socially responsible procreative sexuality as opposed to the irresponsible juvenile and adolescent sexual indulgence which is often condoned, if not freely allowed, pre-maritally. These rights may be delegated (e.g. by a sterile husband), distributed (as in polyandry), split up into a bound moral and symbolic element and a free physical element (as among the Nayar) or transposed in context. This does not alter their significance as the distinctive feature of the conjugal relationship. For it is by entering legitimately into conjugal sexual relations that the transition in status—not, be it noted, in physical maturity—from daughter to wife and son to husband is effected. This transition is accomplishable only once and for all in a person’s lifetime, and that only with the concurrence of society—or rather, to put it more exactly, with the necessary jural authorization.
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Dr Goody’s account shows that Gonja social structure generates very divergent pulls on a person, and so disperses all social relations both temporally and spatially. The result is that marriage inevitably becomes a very unstable partnership. But this applies only to particular marriages. The institution itself, in essence the jurally validated conjugal relationship, is not thereby annulled or even diminished in structural importance. As in all societies, a precise demarcation between unmarried co-habitation, even if it imitates marriage in all particulars of residence, housekeeping, sexual association and procreation, and true, that is legal marriage is maintained; and this is aptly symbolized in the once-for-all status of spouse conferred by first marriage. It is consistent with the Gonja adaptation of the form of marriage to their peculiar economic and political conditions that de facto marriage should be regarded as redundant for women past child-bearing and therefore easily terminable. There is no other legitimate way in which a woman can divest herself of the many contingent duties and responsibilities of the conjugal bond. This is jurally effective because, as Dr Goody demonstrates, the woman is able to resume her filial status in this situation.

My argument implies that the conjugal relationship derives from the marital status of the spouses, that is from the rights and duties, claims and capacities that are conferred on them from the outside, so to speak, I mean from the politico-jural domain. I stress this because it is easy to fall into the error of regarding marriage as a purely domestic matter. That it is not so is evident from the rule that the rights and duties of spouses, once authorized, must be respected by all others, hence the common practice of imposing jural penalties for adultery.

No aspect of marriage has more frequently been described than the ceremonies in which jural and religious sanction as well as social recognition is accorded to it. And none of them is so well known as those by which a bride-price and other marriage gifts are transferred. The African forms of such transactions have been authoritatively elucidated by Dr Lucy Mair and the other contributors to the Survey of African Marriage and Family Life (Phillips 1953). The general view is that these transfers, whether they take the form of valuables, livestock, money, labour service, or largely symbolic goods, certainly in the circumstances typical of societies with a patrilineal descent organization, signalize the transfer to the husband of marital rights over his wife and parental rights over any children that will be born to her. The papers in the present volume all give some attention to these prestations; and they suggest some comments on current views.

Marriage payments and gifts appear to consist of two constituents, a Prime Prestation and Contingent Prestations. The Prime Prestation is stipulated by the marriage laws. It is normally fixed in kind and amount, and is often restricted to the context of marriage as regards its disposal by the recipient.
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(e.g. it is earmarked for the bride-price of the brother of the girl for whom it is given or is offered as a sacrifice to ancestors to announce the marriage). It is the part of the marriage payments which constitutes the *sine qua non* for lawful marriage and which is, therefore, strictly speaking, the sole jural instrument for the transfer of marital rights. Thus it is the part of the marriage payments which stands for the nuclear sexual and parental rights and relationships of the spouses and thus corresponds to the Capital Value in marital rights. Bargaining cannot enter into this. For no matter what its economic worth may be, its significance lies in its binding power as a jural instrument. That is why it is returnable when a marriage is terminated by divorce, and can more reasonably be equated with a pledge than with a purchase price.

The Contingent Prestations have a different meaning, even when they are made up of the same kinds of goods or services as the Prime Prestation. They are often open to bargaining and may be partly or wholly counterbalanced by reciprocal gifts or services from the recipients. This is understandable, for they are not a jural instrument for the transfer of rights but a means of winning and preserving the goodwill of those with the power to transfer marital rights. There is an element of barter in them. In other words, they are the medium through which affinal relations are established and maintained. That is why they are often, if not normally, spread out over time and may be linked with the fortunes of the family. They correspond to the Ancillary Values realized in marriage.

The distinction I am drawing has some interesting corollaries. Clearly it is the Prime Prestation that mediates the movement of the spouses from their pre-marital to their conjugal statuses. But the existence of affinal relationships presupposes that the pre-marital statuses of the spouses are not entirely extinguished by their marriage. If marriage were completely to wipe out a person's filial and sibling status, that is to say his or her pre-marital kinship ties, then neither spouse (nor, by derivation, their kin) could have affinal relations with his or her spouse's kin. Conjugal status does not replace filial status, it is added on to it; and their potentially conflicting co-extension is regulated by arrangements which segregate their respective fields of operation.

It is in this connexion that such incidental features of marriage as co-residence and common housekeeping are relevant. Transfer of the critical marital rights focused in the sexual relationships of the spouses necessitates only the relinquishment by parents of their control over their child's sexual and procreative capacities. It does not require them to give up all other claims on and rights over their child. They may be entitled to hold on to some domestic services from their child and to his or her physical presence in their home at times when the spouse's rights are not thereby infringed. That is why first-married spouses, in some societies, continue to reside with their
respective parents until they themselves become parents and only then acquire a status that entitles them to set up in their own home. It is here that the gifts, payments or services which I have designated Contingent Prestations are sometimes brought into play as a means of inducing a wife’s parents and kin to give up their residual rights and claims on her and permit her to join her husband in their own home.

And there is yet another side to marriage gifts and payments. This is very well brought out in Mrs Robinson’s essay on Trobriand marriage. As I remarked earlier, the chief responsibility for these prestations rests with the parents of the spouses, though they normally go from the parents and selected kin of one spouse to the parents and selected kin of the other. This seems self-evident in a patrilineal or patrilocal system, where jural control over an unmarried person is vested primarily in the father. In this situation marital rights can be established only with the consent of the fathers of a prospective husband and wife; and this is signified by the bridegroom’s father when he undertakes to hand over the Prime Prestation of the bride-price and by the bride’s father when he agrees to accept it.

Mrs Robinson demonstrates that the father’s consent and acquiescence (especially the girl’s father’s) is essential for marriage in the Trobriand Islands. This seems curious, at first sight, in a matrilineal social structure. But the same holds also for matrilineal systems in other parts of the world, as Mrs Robinson points out. Thus it raises important theoretical questions. Some of these are touched upon in both Mrs Robinson’s and Dr Goody’s papers. I will make only one comment. In matrilineal systems, as is well known, a woman’s husband does not acquire full jural control over her children by him. But he does have moral claims, backed by ritual sanctions, on their affection and loyalty in recognition of the responsibility he exercises in their upbringing. It might be argued that this is sufficient to account for the requirement of a father’s consent to his child’s marriage and that the obvious way for him to signify this formally is through the medium of marriage gifts. But Mrs Robinson shows convincingly that the Trobriand father’s role is not as passive as this view would imply. He plays too decisive a part in both the giving and the receiving of marriage prestations. He appears almost to have a right of veto in regard to his daughter’s marriage, which is curious if not, on the face of it, anomalous, in a matrilineal family system.

Mrs Robinson associates the recognition given to the father’s authority with his status by complementary filiation. Clearly he has power and some rights in relation to the basic attributes of marital status, that is, sexual and procreative potentialities. And the reason for this is not far to seek if we consider complementary filiation from the parents’ side. A matrilineal father is his children’s moral mentor. He, therefore, is the guardian of their
sexual development during childhood, a matter of special importance for the
daughter.[4] For a woman to be able to enter licitly and securely upon the
adult sexual role required of her in the conjugal relationship, she must be free
to give up her childish sexual role and the dependent relationship to her
father implied in it. This is essential for her movement from filial to conjugal
status to be properly accomplished. But it can be brought about only with
the consent and goodwill of her father. This is formally documented in the
prestations which dramatize the investiture of her husband with his conjugal
sexual rights. It is valuable to have this aspect of the patrilocal relationship
brought to our attention in the setting of a matrilineal family structure and
shown to be most conspicuously evinced in the transactions of marriage. The
father's control over his daughter's sexual and procreative capacities in
patrilineal family systems has frequently been described. But Mrs Robinson's
study prompts the suspicion that we are still far from a satisfactory theoretical
understanding of what lies behind these practices. We need to know much
more about the feature that is descriptively complementary, in the patrilineal
setting, to the matrilineal father's role in his child's marriage—I mean the
mother's brother's role. It is curious and surely significant that mother's
brothers often have a jurally effective voice in the marriage of a sister's child
in patrilineal systems, this being symbolized, as usual, in their share of the
marriage prestations, both as donors and as recipients.

These comments do not exhaust the theoretical problems that arise in the
essays of my co-authors. They are intended merely to show that doubts about
the possibility of adding anything new to the theoretical analysis of marriage
in tribal society are wholly unfounded. In spite of their self-imposed limits,
the authors of the essays all pose new problems and suggest fruitful hypo-
theses for further research. It would be most interesting to see what general
principles someone skilled in the modern Theory of Games could elicit from
such data as have here been presented. It would also, I believe, well repay the
effort, if someone were to undertake a more rigorous analysis than has yet been
attempted of the correspondences between the values at stake, the prestation
required, and the claims and rights created and transferred in marriage.
Enough is known to justify the conclusion that these correspondences are
minute and particular, not gross and general, and that the prestation
discriminate jurally, and often ritually as well, between the critical and irreducible
elements of marital status and the contingent elements.

NOTES

[1] Cf. Dumont, p. 27, 'The opposition between kin and affines takes on a spatial
aspect; there are kin places and affinal places....'

[2] Cf. the well-known African maxim that the bride-price must not be where the
bride is,
INTRODUCTION

[3] The apparent inconsistency between these quasi-endogamous tendencies and the scale of social mobility in western society has received much attention in various countries. It seems that the findings are open to divergent interpretations. I refrain from discussing this question any further as it is only of marginal relevance to my purpose. It is authoritatively dealt with in Lipset and Bendix, 1959, ch. 11.

[4] We should recall, in this connexion, the contrast Malinowski frequently emphasized between a brother's strict exclusion from concern with his sister's sexual life and a father's permitted interest in her love affairs and marriage, among the Trobrianders.
CONJUGAL SEPARATION AND DIVORCE AMONG THE GONJA OF NORTHERN GHANA

By ESTHER N. GOODY

In analysing the manner in which Gonja marriages are ended, and the frequency with which this occurs, my main concern is to distinguish the pattern of divorce which characterizes this society and to trace the ways in which this is related to other features of the social system. Specifically I shall deal with such problems as: who initiates divorce, at what point in a woman’s life divorce is most likely to occur, the reallocation of rights and obligations which follows and to some extent defines divorce, the alternative roles which are available to adult women, and the spatial correlates of divorce. In conclusion it is suggested that to assume that divorce is necessarily a ‘social evil’ or ‘an index of a state of anomie’ may obscure the fact that in some societies marriage is in practice relevant only for a given stage of the life of one or both partners, and not an indissoluble bond ‘till death do them part’.

The Gonja state, a loose federation of largely autonomous Divisions, lies just north of the limits of the old Ashanti kingdom and extends across the entire breadth of the northern region of Ghana. The population of 84,415 is distributed over an area of 14,460 square miles in a density ranging from four to nine persons per square mile. The open stretches of orchard bush are occasionally relieved by stream beds lined with dense vegetation and, around the major rivers, the Black Volta along the western boundary, the White Volta which flows through the centre of the state, and the Volta proper which forms a part of the southern border, hills covered with forest growth appear.

The Gonja live in scattered compact villages of from sixty to several hundred people, many of which are situated along the old North–South trade routes over which passed the gold and kola nuts from the south that had been exchanged at the borders of the forest country for slaves, cattle and salt of the desert and the tsetse-free northern plains. The villages are situated from five to fifteen miles apart, although a few are even further from their nearest neighbour, while around the Divisional capitals several villages may cluster within a 10 to 15 mile radius. Land around these permanent villages is not ‘owned’, for there is sufficient for all to farm. The system is one of 4 years’ cultivation followed by a long and indefinite period of fallow. The staple crops are yams, millet, guinea corn, maize and cassava. Cattle are kept in small numbers where tsetse allow, and adult men generally own a few sheep, goats and chickens.
SEPARATION AND DIVORCE AMONG THE GONJA

Gonja traditions place the origin of the state in the seventeenth century, when a band of Mande horsemen and their Muslim advisers conquered the several groups of indigenous agriculturalists and settled down to live among them. The different territorial segments of the state, or Divisions, were apportioned out among the sons of the founder, NdeWura Jakpa. The descendants of these Divisional chiefs continue to share among them authority over the villages of the original Division, the office rotating among the two, three or four segments of the ruling family. Several of the Divisions supply in turn, in the same fashion, the paramount chief of the Gonja state, the YagbumWura.

The Ruling group, the Ngbanya, descendants of the conquering Mande, make up one of the three social estates into which the population of Gonja is divided. The Muslim estate is the smallest of these, although it consists of several patronymic groups which tend to be localized in or near the Divisional capitals. Muslim office-holders act as religious advisers to Divisional chiefs and to the paramount, and have formal duties in the enrobing of chiefs and in the annual Damba ceremony at which the political constitution of the Division is acted out and reaffirmed.

The third social estate is made up of several Commoner groups with differing cultural and linguistic affinities. There are Commoner groups who speak dialects of the Mossi, Grusi, Gurma and Senufo subgroups of the Gur languages while others speak, as do the Ngbanya and many of the Muslims, dialects of the Guang subgroup of the Kwa languages. All members of the Ruling estate speak a single Guang dialect, Ngbanyito, but those whose Divisions contain Commoners speaking other languages or dialects are bi- or tri-lingual. These Commoners appear to have had acephalous political systems; their office-holders today are Earth priests (tindaana) and shrine priests (kagbirwura).

Although Commoners and Rulers are pagans, except for a few converts to Islam in the larger towns, Muslim elders are often called in to officiate at life crisis ceremonies. This is not held to be vital for the efficacy of the ceremony, but is thought to give added merit to the occasion. A member of the Ruling group who has been brought up in the ways of Islam (e bu bori—'he prays to God') must give up public observances on taking office. The authority of religious and political leaders is conceived to be of a separate and complementary nature, and neither may usurp the power of the other.

As this suggests, the Gonja political system is far from being a despotic one. In addition to the Muslim offices, and to the minor Ngbanya chiefships, there are positions in each Division held by Commoners. Vested in certain Commoner kin groups are offices pertaining to the Earth or to powerful shrines. Other Commoners hold office through maternal filiation to the Ruling group. These Sister's-Son chiefs cannot succeed to the Divisional chiefship, nor pass on their positions to their sons, for membership in each of the social estates
is based on agnicl kinship. A man belongs to the estate of his father. Yet a Sister’s-Son chiefship may carry with it considerable power. Some villages are traditionally placed under a Sister’s-Son chief, and often a Divisional chief will take as his closest adviser and confidant a man who holds one of these chiefships. For such a man has been given office as a personal mark of favour, not, as with members of the Ruling estate, as a matter of birthright. And further, this office is terminal; there can be no promotion and a Sister’s-Son chief has nothing to gain from participating in court intrigue, while for a member of the Ruling estate a minor chiefship is but the first step on a ladder which may one day lead to the paramountcy.

While estate membership, and thus succession to most offices, is determined by agnicl filiation, those who share rights in the same office do not otherwise form a corporate descent group. They are unlikely to reside together, property does not necessarily pass between them, and jural authority is vested not in the senior member of a group of agnicl kinsmen, but partly in the head of the compound in which a man is living and partly in the eldest of his father’s classificatory siblings, who may be a maternal, or paternal half sibling, or a cross or parallel cousin of the father. Further, considerable ritual authority and some rights to property are vested in maternal kin. Thus while agnicl descent is important in determining rights to office, for other purposes the full range of an individual’s kinsfolk are significant. I have considered the system to be bilateral or cognatic. Neither in terminology nor behaviour are there recognized limits to the extension of cognatic kinship ties. Where time and distance have rendered connexions unknown, and distant kinsmen strangers, kinship, except in a vague residual sense, lapses.

Marriage is the normal state for all adults in Gonja society during the active middle years of life. Polygyny is permitted but not widely practised. Out of a total of 197 adult males of two central Gonja villages, 13% were unmarried, 69% had one wife, and 18% had two or more wives.

There are no restrictions placed on the intermarriage of members of any of the three estates and a consideration of current marriages in the village of Buipe, where all three estates are substantially represented, indicates that marriages between estates frequently occur (Table 1).

Table 1. Married women in each estate with husband of Ruling, Commoner and Muslim estates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Husband’s estate</th>
<th>Ruling</th>
<th>Commoner</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wife’s estate</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>5 (45%)</td>
<td>5 (45%)</td>
<td>11 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruling</td>
<td>8 (24%)</td>
<td>12 (35%)</td>
<td>14 (41%)</td>
<td>34 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commoner</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SEPARATION AND DIVORCE AMONG THE GONJA

Nor are there either formal or actual territorial restrictions on marriage. In a group of thirty-five men whose fathers were born in Buipe, about one-quarter had married women whose fathers were also from Buipe; another quarter had taken wives whose fathers came from other villages in Buipe Division, while the remaining half had married women whose paternal villages lay in other Gonja Divisions (see Table 2).

Table 2. Marriages of 35 men whose fathers were born in Buipe, by residence of wife's father and distance of wife's father's village from Buipe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife's father from</th>
<th>Other villages in Buipe Division</th>
<th>Other Divisions</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average distance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from Buipe in miles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are variations in the ceremonies typical of each estate, in central Gonja there are several features common to all. In all cases it is the transfer by the groom's representative to the father or guardian of the bride of twelve shillings and twelve kola nuts which formally legalizes the union. No more substantial payments of bridewealth or dowry change hands, although gifts from a man to his sweetheart are an important part of courting. A man is also expected to make occasional presents of grain, meat, palm wine, and small sums of money to the bride's family during the courting period and in the case of an important chief or elder these may be worth, in all, several pounds. Such gifts are necessary to win consent to the match but not to make it legitimate. Courting gifts have no bearing on the legitimacy of children, and are not reclaimable on divorce.

At marriage a woman goes to join her husband in whichever compound he may be living. As a man may be resident with either maternal or paternal kin this cannot be characterized as patrilocal marriage; the term virilocal is more appropriate. The Gonja do not recognize the sororate, and, indeed, prohibit a man from marrying two sisters or first cousins. So strong is the feeling that no man should marry twice into the same kindred (save possibly his own) that I have known a youth to be dissuaded from marrying the daughter of a woman who had briefly been the wife of a paternal uncle, although there was no issue of that union. This prohibition on marrying twice into the same kindred continues after the death of the original spouse. Thus there is no form of levirate or widow inheritance, and on the death of her husband a woman of marriageable age returns, after a suitable period of mourning, to
her natal kin. In fact, elderly widows also make this move, a practice which has important implications for Gonja divorce. It is true that Muslims speak of inheriting the wife of an elder patrilateral parallel cousin, but only one instance of this was recorded. With this single exception, rights over women may be said to be completely individualized.

The rights over women which are transferred at marriage are essentially rights to services, economic, domestic, ritual and sexual. Each married woman is allotted a plot in her husband’s farm in which to plant the beans, okra and peppers which are her responsibility. In addition she is expected to contribute labour at certain times in the agricultural cycle. But men are the farmers; women help but do not farm. Their main concern is with the care of husband, children and the compound, and the daily round is occupied by trips for firewood and water, or to the farm to fetch produce or condiments, the washing of clothes and the preparation of food.

All important ritual offices and positions are held by men. Mallams and Limams, tindaanas and shrine priests act as representatives of the community with respect to supernatural forces of various sorts. However, in the sphere of domestic ritual, while men still occupy the central roles as heads of compound and kin groups, women also have a place. This is due to the fact that most domestic rituals and rites de passage include as a central rite the preparation and sharing of a sacramental meal. Both preparation and distribution of these meals are left to women, and it is often a wife who is specified as the proper person to direct operations. To the extent that domestic rituals focus on the preparation and sharing of food, the wife’s domestic services become ritual services.

Rights in uxorem among the Gonja consist, then, of economic, domestic, ritual and sexual services. With regard to the latter, a husband has prescriptive rights in his wife’s sexuality while they are living together, and may claim a fine, and administer a beating to an adulterer caught in flagrante delicto. Erring wives, although they may be beaten by an irate husband before the neighbours can stop him, are not legally subject to physical chastisement or monetary fine. Adultery, unless it is recurrent and ostentatious, is seldom the sole cause of divorce.

Rights in genetricem in Gonja are extremely complex and can only be roughly summarized here. Briefly, they are coextensive with ties of biological consanguinity and are never defined by socio-legal fictions. Thus the pater is always the genitor, whether the child is born before his mother’s marriage, of an adulterous union, or in wedlock. By pater here is meant the man from whom a child traces his paternity and thus his relationship with paternal ancestors, derives his position in the community with respect to territorial and political (estate) affiliation, from whom, and through whom he has the right to claim support in litigation, medicine in time of sickness, and food in time of hunger,
and through whom he has rights of inheritance in masculine property. This is not to say that a child is necessarily reared by his *pater*. Indeed, in Gonja this is frequently not the case, for two sorts of reasons. On the one hand, children may be reared by their mother's husband although he has no rights in them and they none in him, because of the latter's tie with their mother. Conversely, kinsmen of either parent, in whom reciprocal rights are vested, frequently act as foster parents. Thus it is not the distinction between *pater* and *genitor* which is important for understanding individual life histories as well as Gonja social structure, but rather that between the *pater-genitor* as parent, and a kinsham, or occasionally a step-father, as foster parent. That is, the individual who acts as the socializing agent must be identified and, where necessary, distinguished from the *pater-genitor*. In Gonja one must inquire not only 'Who bore you?' (*wane kurwe fo?*) but also 'Who reared you?' (*wane belo fo?*).

Rights in *genetricem* are tied to biological parenthood, but they are to some extent shared by the siblings, parents, and parents' siblings of the biological father and mother. Rights of this latter sort may be termed derived rights, and although latent for most children for most of the time, they are made explicit in the institution of fostering. In the village of Buipe at the time the census was made, approximately 18% of the children of suitable age were living with foster parents. About half of these were girls and half boys.

At marriage the Gonja husband acquires exclusive rights over his wife's sexuality. This makes it highly likely that she will bear children of whom he is the biological father. In this sense a husband obtains rights in *genetricem* through marriage. He cannot, however, be accepted as *pater* of any child of his wife's known to have been begotten by another. This rule is often phrased in terms of the importance of restricting succession to office to direct descendants in the male line. Its observance is ensured by strong supernatural sanctions, for it is a man's own immediate ancestors, both paternal and maternal, to whom he turns for help in crises. Since the ancestors are not only uninterested in, but powerless over, mortals to whom they are not related, it is held to be useless to seek assistance from a dead step-father who is not a kinsman. The situation is rendered more complex, and more compelling, by Gonja beliefs about the way the ancestors behave. These hold that a man who has offended them may be punished through his children or those of his collaterals. Thus when a person suffers misfortune or falls ill it may be due to sins of his kin rather than to anything he has done or omitted to do. The relevance of this for true declaration of paternity lies in the fact that most children are ill at one time or another, and if a man or his wife should be trying to pass a child off as the husband's when this is not so, danger to the child tends to be interpreted as an expression of the anger, direct or indirect, of the true paternal ancestors. These must then be acknowledged, and in the
case of a minor, the father or a paternal kinsman found to approach them on the sick person's behalf.

It is thus in a very limited sense that rights in genetricem may be said to be transferred at marriage. Strictly speaking, it is the right to beget children, and to restrain other men from doing so, which marriage conveys to the husband. But physiological paternity alone can convey rights over the children themselves. This being so, it is not surprising to find that the Gonja recognize no circumstances under which one man may be deputed to beget children for another. The suggestion that this did occur among certain peoples was met not so much by disbelief as with a lack of understanding. This view is perhaps related to the fact that the Gonja hold that it is the man who places a child in the mother's womb for warmth and protection during the early stages of growth—the woman nourishes it, but does not contribute to the actual formation of the foetus.

It has seemed important to go into such detail about rights in genetricem in part because it has been suggested that marriage could be defined in terms of the admission of children to 'full birth-status rights' in their society (Gough 1959). It is difficult to see how the Gonja child born out of wedlock suffers a limitation of his 'birth-status rights' in his society, excepting in so far as he is liable to be taunted by his peers. As I have indicated, rights normally derived through the father are granted such a child if his father is known and will acknowledge him. Rights derived through the mother are in any case not affected.

Yet it would be totally incorrect to suggest that the Gonja do not recognize marriage. Lovers who are not married according to the traditional rites are referred to as jipo, as are a courting couple who have set up housekeeping together for a trial period. Between jipo no rights may be said to obtain; for example, there is no right of compensation for the woman's adultery. Claims based on the rights which vest in marital partnership may be informally pressed. A man may question his lover about an extended trip to the bush latrine, or complain because the soup is tasteless. But he cannot appeal to her kinsfolk to intervene on his behalf and any show of force or anger would quickly end the union. Further, domestic arrangements based on the jipo relationship are, and are seen as being, temporary. Once a couple who are jipo has settled down together in the sexual and domestic relationships which are also the basis of marriage and of the household, marriage rites tend to be celebrated within a few months. For marriage itself may be so easily ended that there is no advantage in failing to regularize the union. The three cases of trial domestic establishments which I actually observed all involved men and women in their late twenties or thirties; the women in each instance had with them young children of previous marriages. In two cases the couple later married. I left the village before the last pair had reached a final decision.
SEPARATION AND DIVORCE AMONG THE GONJA

There is an additional reason for considering at such length the type of rights transferred at marriage. This has to do with the definition of divorce as it operates in this society. For basically it is the withdrawal of marital rights which constitutes effective divorce. In Gonja rights acquired at marriage are essentially rights to specific services. There are no rights of any substance which either spouse holds over the other when they are separated, for services inevitably tend to lapse. Thus marriage is closely bound up with co-residence and a separation which lasts for any length of time results in the withdrawal of marital rights, which is in fact divorce. In the discussion of divorce procedures and the pattern of divorce which follows, the difficulty in distinguishing between divorce and separation is treated at some length.

Before turning to this problem, however, I want first to consider some data on the frequency of divorce in central Gonja. For the incidence of divorce, and specifically what might be called patterns of divorce, are the main concern of this paper. Pattern is here used to refer to the fact that there are features of Gonja divorce which tend to vary together. It would be possible to isolate different ‘types’ of divorce from the same material. Such an approach would, however, fail to give adequate emphasis to the interrelatedness of the factors involved. Specifically, by pattern is meant: (1) the time at which a divorce occurs, here the point in a woman’s life, and not the stage of a marriage; (2) the manner of bringing about the dissolution of marriage; (3) the role which the woman adopts as an alternative to that of wife in the previous union; and finally, (4) the consequences for those involved, and on a different level, for the society as a whole, of the ending of one set of relationships and the replacing of these by a different set.

The first factor, and the one which most nearly approximates an independent variable, has to do with the time at which divorce occurs. As Fortes notes in his discussion of the stability of Tallensi marriage (1949a: 84–7), early marriages uncomplicated by the birth of children may be lightly treated as experimental where later, fruitful unions have a greater tendency to be stable. For an understanding of the Gonja situation it is important to distinguish not only between a high rate of early divorce and a consistently high divorce rate, but also between frequent divorce during the years of active child-bearing on the one hand and a high rate of divorce in old age on the other. [14]

I take as a unit of reference here the life span of a woman rather than using stages in a marriage, because a consideration of the former seems to throw more light on the significant variables. I am thus concerned with the effects of the dissolution of marriage during the early phase of a woman’s marital career before she bears children, or when she has but one or two very young children, as compared with the correlates of divorce during the middle, child-rearing phase, and again with those of the last, post-menopause phase when her children are adolescent or adult and when child-bearing and
sexuality are no longer primary considerations. For Gonja marriages are ended easily and frequently in each of these phases, but with quite different consequence for the actors and for the social structure within which they operate.

Dissolution of marriage may come about through formal divorce, elopement, separation, or death of husband. The last of these becomes, of course, increasingly likely as a woman grows older, and its consequences vary depending on the wife's age and the ages of her children when she is widowed. Among the three remaining possibilities, those among which the actors have a measure of choice, there is also some variation with the wife's age. Formal divorce is in any case rare and I have too few instances to indicate a trend. Elopement is also infrequently resorted to, but in the nature of the situation is limited to the early and middle periods of a woman's adult life. Women past the age of 50 seldom if ever remarry in any case and are thus unlikely to take this method of ending an unwelcome union. Elopement is more often resorted to by the adolescents who in this way seek to escape the matches arranged for them by parents or guardians. For older women, parental and fraternal authority are not determining factors and the more usual practice of the wife returning to her natal home and remarrying from there is not likely to be frustrated by intercession of her kinsfolk on the husband's behalf. The most common form, gradual transformation of an extended separation into a de facto divorce, may occur at any time in a woman's life and is frequently resorted to as old age approaches.

When a young or middle-aged woman leaves a husband, it is almost without exception to marry again within at most a year or two. Thus one husband is substituted for another and the role of wife although interrupted is not abandoned. This is underlined by the fact that there is a marked tendency for women to bear children to each man to whom they are married (Table 8, p. 27). As women reach late middle age the likelihood of a divorce or separation being followed by remarriage decreases until, in a sample of 91 adult women, of the 19 who were over the age of 50, only four were married (Table 9, p. 37). Where widowhood, divorce, or conjugal separation are not followed by remarriage, a woman no longer engages in those tasks and activities, domestic, sexual and reproductive, which are associated with the role of wife. Specifically, she no longer lives with a husband, but rather with kinsfolk. Among the Gonja such a woman is said to be resident as sister, or very occasionally a father's or mother's sister. The implication of this change of roles will be discussed in detail below.

The last of the factors to be influenced by the time at which a divorce occurs has to do with the nature of the relationships derived from the marriage, and by extension, with the consequences of the marriage and the divorce for the social structure itself. Frequent divorce during the early years of marriage, particularly before the birth of children, is consistent with high overall marital and conjugal stability of marriage. Divorce in this phase of a woman's life